

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

DANIEL GUFFEY,

Petitioner,

vs.

RICHARD SUBIA, Warden, et al.,

Respondent.

CASE NO: 07-CV-1620-IEG (CAB)

ORDER:

**(1) ADOPTING THE MAGISTRATE
JUDGE'S REPORT (Doc. No. 32);**

**(2) REJECTING THE
PETITIONER'S OBJECTIONS (Doc.
No. 38);**

**(3) DENYING THE PETITION FOR
WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS (Doc.
No. 1); and**

**(4) DENYING CERTIFICATE OF
APPEALABILITY.**

Daniel Guffey (hereinafter "Petitioner"), is a state prisoner proceeding *pro se* with a Petition for a Writ of Habeas Corpus by a Person in State Custody pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254. (Doc. No. 1.) This matter was referred to United States Magistrate Judge Cathy Ann Bencivengo pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B). Magistrate Judge Bencivengo issued a Report

1 and Recommendation (“Report”) recommending the Court deny the petition. (Doc. No. 32.)
2 Petitioner filed objections to the Report. (Doc. No. 127.)

3 Following *de novo* review of petitioner’s claims, the Court finds the Report to be
4 thorough, complete, and an accurate analysis of the legal issues presented in the petition. For the
5 reasons explained below, the Court: (1) adopts the Report in full; (2) rejects Petitioner’s
6 objections; (3) denies the petition for writ of habeas corpus; and (4) denies a certificate of
7 appealability.

8 **BACKGROUND**

9 **I. Factual Background**

10 The Report contains an accurate recital of the facts as determined by the California Court
11 of Appeal, and the Court fully adopts the Report’s statement of facts. As the magistrate judge
12 correctly noted, the Court presumes state court findings of fact to be correct.

13 The following facts as drawn from the Report are relevant to evaluate the petition.
14 Petitioner previously had a romantic relationship with Kathleen Dockler. Dockler ended the
15 relationship, and began an intimate relationship with Rawson, a close friend of Petitioner’s.
16 Petitioner was very upset about the breakup and began stalking Dockler. On December 24, he
17 confronted Dockler and threatened to kill Rawson and his family. Petitioner also told Dockler’s
18 friend, Linda Drake, that he was going to “take (Rawson) out” and that Rawson was not “going
19 to be a problem anymore.” On approximately December 29, Petitioner asked his friend, Bruce
20 Phifer to beat Rawson up. Phifer declined, but said that he would mention it to Jesse Gehrke,
21 who worked for his drywall business. Petitioner had several other encounters with Dockler and
22 Rawson that day, which led them to decide they needed to get a restraining order against
23 Petitioner.

24 On December 25, Phifer wrote down Petitioner’s phone number and gave it to Gehrke.
25 In the early morning hours of January 1, 2002, Petitioner e-mailed Dockler a love poem that said
26 in part, “by the time that you read this, it will have all come undone.” That night, Petitioner told
27 a friend, Amber Stanley, that he felt Rawson had betrayed him and asked whether she knew
28 anyone who would help set Rawson up to be the victim of a hit-and-run. Close family friend
Jeremiah Beamer later joined Petitioner and Stanley for part of the morning; he thought

1 Petitioner appeared angry and that his demeanor was “weird.” At approximately 4 a.m. on
2 January 2, 2002, Petitioner called Phifer, upset and saying that something bad had happened.

3 Meanwhile, on the evening of January 1, 2002, Gehrke and Christopher Bo Smith met up
4 with Kyla Stark. The three arrived in La Mesa sometime before 9 a.m. the next morning. Later
5 that morning, Stark, Gehrke and Smith went to the Rawsons’ house, and Rawson invited them
6 inside. In the same time frame (sometime between 11 and 11:15 a.m.), a woman who was
7 working nearby saw Petitioner’s van, which was distinctive because it had the logo and phone
8 number of his locksmith business on the side, driving very slowly down the street in front of the
9 Rawsons’ house. While inside the house, Gehrke used Rawson’s phone to call Petitioner’s cell
10 phone. Stark later saw Gehrke and Smith stab Rawson repeatedly and saw Smith slit his throat.

11 In the meantime, after leaving the Rawsons’ neighborhood, Petitioner drove to Mission
12 Valley to pick up Stanley. While he was in the parking lot of the hotel where Stanley was
13 staying, he received Gehrke’s call from the Rawson’s home phone. Stanley noticed that
14 Petitioner was wearing the same clothes as he had on the prior night, but was “really agitated”
15 and appeared to have injuries on his hands. Petitioner told Stanley that he had slapped Rawson
16 around and “got[ten] [Rawson] good.”

17 Police arrested Petitioner that evening. Two days after the murder, Gehrke and Smith
18 showed up at Phifer’s motel room, saying that they needed to leave town. Smith told Phifer that
19 they had “offed” Rawson and “I sent it on home with the old timer,” a brand of pocketknife that
20 he owned. On January 20, 2002, Smith bragged to a friend that he had slit someone’s throat.
21 Shortly thereafter, the police arrested Gehrke and Smith for parole violations, but did not charge
22 them with the murder. The officers found Petitioner’s cell phone number written on a scrap of
23 paper in Gehrke’s wallet. The police also arrested Stark.

24 In June 2002, Petitioner talked to the prosecutor and a detective in a confidential
25 interview. Four months later, the district attorney charged Gehrke, Smith and Petitioner with one
26 count each of conspiracy to assault and murder.

26 **II. State Procedural Background**

27 The Report contains a complete and accurate summary of the state court proceedings, and
28 the Court fully adopts the Report’s statement of state procedural background. In sum, a jury

1 found Petitioner guilty of second degree murder and conspiracy to commit assault. (CT 527-28.)
 2 The same jury found co-defendants Gehrke and Smith guilty of first degree murder and
 3 conspiracy to commit assault, and returned true findings that they personally used a knife during
 4 the commission of the offenses. (CT 330-31, 621-22.) On September 18, 2003, Petitioner was
 5 sentenced to a state prison term of 15 years-to-life. (CT 564.)

6 The appellate court consolidated Petitioner's appeal with that of his two co-defendants,
 7 and affirmed the convictions in an unpublished opinion. (Lodgment No. 6, People v. Gehrke, et
 8 al., D042984, slip op. (Cal. Ct. App. Jan. 31, 2006).) The state supreme court consolidated
 9 Petitioner's petition for review with that of his co-defendants, and denied the petition by an order
 10 which stated in full: "Petitions for review DENIED." (Lodgment No. 8.)

11 **III. Federal Procedural Background**

12 On August 15, 2007, Petitioner filed a Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus challenging his
 13 San Diego County Superior Court convictions. Respondent filed an Answer to the Petition, and
 14 lodged portions of the state court record. (Doc. No. 25.) Petitioner filed a Traverse with an
 15 attached Notice of Lodgment. (Doc. No. 29.)

16 On August 28, 2009, Magistrate Judge Cathy Ann Bencivengo issued a Report
 17 recommending the petition be denied. (Doc. No 32.) After being granted two extensions of
 18 time, Petitioner filed objections to the Report on January 13, 2010. (Doc. No. 38.) In his
 19 objections, Petitioner argues that the magistrate judge erred in finding that the state court did not
 20 make an unreasonable application of clearly established federal law or an unreasonable
 21 determination of the facts in light of the evidence. Petitioner also requests an evidentiary
 22 hearing. Because Petitioner has objected to the Report in its entirety, the Court reviews the
 23 Report *de novo*. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C); Holder v. Holder, 392 F.3d 1009, 1022 (9th Cir.
 24 2004).

25 **DISCUSSION**

26 **I. Legal Standard**

27 The Report sets forth the correct standard of review for a petition for writ of habeas
 28 corpus . Under 28 U.S.C. § 2254(d):

(d) An application for a writ of habeas corpus on behalf of a person in custody pursuant to the judgment of a State court shall not be granted with respect to any claim that was adjudicated on the merits in State court proceedings unless the adjudication of the claim—

(1) resulted in a decision that was contrary to, or involved an unreasonable application of, clearly established Federal law, as determined by the Supreme Court of the United States; or

(2) resulted in a decision that was based on an unreasonable determination of the facts in light of the evidence presented in the State court proceeding.

28 U.S.C. § 2254(d); Williams v. Taylor, 529 U.S. 362, 403, 412-13 (2000). Under § 2254(d)(1), a state court’s decision is “contrary to” clearly established federal law if the state court (1) “arrives at a conclusion opposite to that reached by this Court on a question of law” or (2) “confronts facts that are materially indistinguishable from a relevant Supreme Court precedent and arrives at a result opposite to ours.” Williams, 529 U.S. at 405. A state court’s decision is an “unreasonable application” if the application was “objectively unreasonable.” Lockyer v. Andrade, 538 U.S. 63, 75-76 (2003).

Under § 2254(d)(2), habeas relief is not available due to a state court’s “unreasonable determination of the facts” unless the underlying factual determinations were objectively unreasonable. See Miller-El v. Cockrell, 537 U.S. 322, 340 (2003); see also Rice v. Collins, 546 U.S. 333, 341-42 (2006) (the fact that “[r]easonable minds reviewing the record might disagree” does not render a decision objectively unreasonable).

II. Petitioner’s Request for an Evidentiary Hearing

In his objections, Petitioner requests an evidentiary hearing. Section 2254(e) “substantially restricts the district court’s discretion to grant an evidentiary hearing.” Baja v. Ducharme, 187 F.3d 1075, 1077 (9th Cir. 1999). Section 2254(e)(2) provides:

If the applicant has failed to develop the factual basis of a claim in State court proceedings, the court shall not hold an evidentiary hearing on the claim unless the applicant shows that--

(A) the claim relies on--

(i) a new rule of constitutional law, made retroactive to cases on collateral review by the Supreme Court, that was previously unavailable; or

1 (ii) a factual predicate that could not have been previously discovered through the
2 exercise of due diligence; and

3 (B) the facts underlying the claim would be sufficient to establish by clear and
4 convincing evidence that but for constitutional error, no reasonable factfinder
would have found the applicant guilty of the underlying offense.

5 28 U.S.C. § 2254(e)(2). In his objections, Petitioner does not contend that he developed the
6 factual basis of the claim in state court or requested an evidentiary hearing in state court. See
7 Williams, 529 U.S. at 437 (“Diligence will require in the usual case that the prisoner, at a
8 minimum, seek an evidentiary hearing in state court in the manner prescribed by state law.”).
9 Regardless, a hearing would not be appropriate because Petitioner fails to explain how his claims
10 would be advanced by a hearing. Petitioner appears to argue that a hearing is warranted because
11 the Report is based solely on the facts set forth in the appellate court opinion. However, the
12 magistrate judge correctly deferred to the state court findings of fact. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(e)(1)
13 (“[A] determination of a factual issue made by a State court shall be presumed to be correct” and
14 a petitioner has “the burden of rebutting the presumption of correctness by clear and convincing
15 evidence.”). Petitioner does not challenge the accuracy of any particular facts as set forth by the
16 appellate court or explain what facts he would seek to develop at a hearing.

17 Petitioner also appears to argue that a hearing is warranted because the state courts and
18 magistrate judge did not consider the transcript of his “free talk” confidential interview with the
19 prosecutor. Petitioner does not explain why this warrants a hearing. Petitioner has already
20 attached the “free talk” transcript to his Traverse. (Traverse, Not. of Lodgment.) In any event, it
21 is unclear how consideration of the transcript would advance his claims. Petitioner vaguely
22 states that it “sheds light in favor of petitioner and his valid claim of innocence of murder.”
23 (Objections at 5:14-15.) This is unlikely considering Petitioner’s counsel argued vigorously at
24 trial that the “free talk” transcript should not be turned over to Petitioner’s co-defendants because
25 it “would bring out things that my client would hope to be secret” and the co-defendants “will
bring out things [from the ‘free talk’] which will hurt my client.” (Pet. at 14.)

26 The Court therefore denies Petitioner’s request for an evidentiary hearing.

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28 //

1 **III. Analysis of Petitioner’s Claims**

2 Petitioner raises three claims in his Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus: (1) Petitioner’s
 3 Fourteenth Amendment right to due process was violated because the evidence was insufficient
 4 to support a finding that the murder was the natural and probable consequence of simple assault
 5 (Pet. at 6); (2) Petitioner’s Fourteenth Amendment right to due process was violated by the
 6 failure to sever his trial from the trial of his co-defendants (Pet. at 7); and (3) Petitioner’s right to
 7 confront and cross-examine witnesses under the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments was violated
 8 by the admission of co-defendant Smith’s extrajudicial statements (Pet. at 8).

9 **A. Claim One: Sufficiency of the Evidence**

10 Petitioner claims his Fourteenth Amendment right to due process was violated because
 11 the evidence was insufficient to support a finding that the murder was the natural and probable
 12 consequence of simple assault. (Pet. at 6.) Because the state supreme court summarily denied
 13 Petitioner’s habeas corpus petition, the magistrate judge correctly “looked through” to the
 14 underlying appellate court decision. See Ylst v. Nunnemaker, 501 U.S. 797, 803-04 (1991);
 15 Medina v. Hornung, 386 F.3d 872, 877 (9th Cir. 2004).

16 The magistrate judge correctly identified Jackson v. Virginia, 443 U.S. 307, 319 (1979),
 17 as setting forth the clearly established federal law regarding sufficiency of the evidence claims in
 18 the criminal context. Under Jackson, “the applicant is entitled to habeas corpus relief if it is
 19 found that upon the record evidence adduced at the trial no rational trier of fact could have found
 20 proof of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.” Id. at 324. Evidence is sufficient as long as any
 21 rational trier of fact could have been persuaded of the defendant’s guilt, viewing the result in the
 22 light most favorable to the judgment and drawing all reasonable inferences from the evidence
 23 which support the jury’s verdict. Id. at 319. In his objections, Petitioner argues that the
 24 magistrate judge erred in citing to state law in addressing his sufficiency of the evidence claim.
 25 However, Jackson instructs federal habeas courts to analyze these claims “with explicit reference
 26 to the substantive elements of the criminal offense as defined by state law.” Id. at 324 n.16.

27 The magistrate judge correctly identifies the controlling state law. “The determination of
 28 whether one criminal act was a natural and probable consequence of another criminal act is
 generally a factual question to be resolved by the jury in light of all the circumstances.” People

1 v. Nguyen, 21 Cal. App. 4th 518, 531 (1993). “The test to be applied is an objective one: ‘. . .
 2 whether, under all the circumstances presented, a reasonable person in the [actor]’s position
 3 would have or should have known that the charged offense was a reasonably foreseeable
 4 consequence’ of the target offense.” Id.

5 In his objections, Petitioner argues that, as a matter of law, murder cannot be a natural
 6 and probable consequence of a conspiracy to commit simple assault. The case law establishes
 7 otherwise. See People v. Prettyman, 58 Cal. Rptr. 2d 827 (Ct. App. 1996) (“Murder . . . is *not*
 8 the ‘natural and probable consequence’ of ‘trivial’ activities.”); People v. Montes, 74 Cal. App.
 9 4th 1050, 1054-56 (Ct. App. 1999) (finding that “[u]nder the circumstances . . . , the targeted
 10 offenses of simple assault and breach of the peace for fighting in public were not trivial”). But
 11 see People v. Hickles, 56 Cal. App. 4th 1183, 1197 (1997). The Court also rejects Petitioner’s
 12 argument that murder was not a natural and probable consequence of the conspiracy because
 13 there was no evidence that Petitioner knew Gehrke and Smith were armed or that they were
 14 likely to use weapons or force. See Montes, 74 Cal. App. 4th at 1056 (rejecting the argument
 15 that to be guilty of aiding and abetting, one must know of and encourage the perpetrator’s
 16 intended use of a weapon); People v. Godinez, 2 Cal. App. 4th 492, 501 n.5 (Ct. App. 1992)
 17 (same).

18 The magistrate judge properly concluded that sufficient evidence exists to support a
 19 finding that the victim’s murder was a natural and probable consequence of the conspiracy
 20 engineered by Petitioner to assault the victim:

21 The jury was presented with evidence from which they could reasonably conclude
 22 that the death of the victim was a foreseeable consequence of the attack Petitioner
 23 commissioned on the victim. Kathleen Dockler, Petitioner’s ex-girlfriend, began a
 24 romantic relationship with the victim while still living with Petitioner, and
 25 testified that after Petitioner found out about the relationship he twice threatened
 26 to kill the victim, and that the victim was killed several days after he made the
 27 threats. (Lodgment No. 1 Reporter’s Tr. [“RT”] at 169-84.) Although Petitioner
 28 contends that he only asked Phifer to scare or beat up the victim, the jury was
 presented with evidence that after Phifer indicated that he was not interested in
 getting involved in a domestic situation, Gehrke immediately indicated that he
 was interested, and the victim was killed two days after Phifer gave Gehrke
 Petitioner’s telephone number and told Gehrke to give Petitioner a call. (RT 531-
 37.) After the murder, Gehrke told Phifer that they had done what Petitioner had
 wanted them to do, which was to stab the victim. (RT 537-38.) This evidence,

1 coupled with the state court's finding that Petitioner solicited Gehrke to join the
 2 conspiracy knowing that Gehrke had previously been involved in a scuffle in
 3 which someone was stabbed, provides sufficient evidence for the jury to find that
 4 Petitioner commissioned Gehrke to assault and possibly stab the victim, and that
 5 murder was a natural and probable consequence of the target crime. Petitioner
 6 was also linked to the conspiracy by evidence that he was seen in the victim's
 7 neighborhood around the time of the killing, that he received a telephone call at or
 8 around the time of the killing, and that he was aware that Gehrke, Smith and Stark
 9 were inside the victim's house about to attack the victim. It was objectively
 10 reasonable for the state court to find that a reasonable person in Petitioner's
 11 position knew or should have known that the victim may have been killed as a
 12 result of the type of target crime perpetrated here.

13 (Report at 12:3-13:4.) In his objections, Petitioner argues that the Court must assess the
 14 constitutionality of allowing conviction for murder as the natural and probable cause of simple
 15 assault, and assess whether jury instructions to that effect reduce the prosecution's burden of
 16 proof. However, as discussed above, the magistrate judge correctly analyzed this claim with
 17 reference to the substantive elements of the criminal offense as defined by state law, as required
 18 by Jackson. See 443 U.S. at 324 n.16.

19 Accordingly, the Court rejects Petitioner's objections, adopts the Report, and denies the
 20 petition as to this claim.

21 **B. Claim Two: Failure to Sever Trial**

22 Petitioner claims that his Fourteenth Amendment right to due process was violated by the
 23 failure to sever his trial from the trial of his co-defendants.¹ (Pet. at 7.) Petitioner raises two
 24 issues: his defense was mutually antagonistic with his co-defendants' defenses, and his right to
 25 testify in his own behalf was circumscribed by the holding of the trial judge that the transcript of
 26 the "free talk" confidential interview with the prosecutor would be turned over to the other
 27 defendants if he testified. Petitioner objects to the magistrate judge's rejection of both of these
 28 arguments.

¹ In his objections, Petitioner raises the related argument that he was "forced to have his
 first appellate review as of right combined with the co-defendants." Petitioner points to no
 authority prohibiting the appellate court from consolidating Petitioner's appeal with that of his
 two co-defendants.

1 **a. Failure to sever**

2 Petitioner contends his defense was mutually antagonistic with his co-defendants’
3 defenses, and therefore the state court should have granted his motion to sever the trial. Because
4 the state supreme court summarily denied Petitioner’s habeas corpus petition, the magistrate
5 judge correctly “looked through” to the underlying appellate court decision.

6 The magistrate judge correctly identifies Zafiro v. United States, 506 U.S. 534 (1993) as
7 setting forth the clearly established federal law on this subject. There is a strong preference in
8 the federal system for joint trials of defendants who are indicted together. Id. at 537. A court
9 should grant severance under Rule 14 of the Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure “only if a
10 serious risk exists that a joint trial would compromise a particular trial right of a properly joined
11 defendant or prevent the jury from reliably determining guilt or innocence.” Id. at 539. In
12 Zafiro, the Court declined to adopt a bright line rule that mutually antagonistic defenses are per
13 se prejudicial. Id. at 534. “[L]ess drastic measures, such as limiting instructions, often will
14 suffice to cure any risk of prejudice.” Id. at 539.

15 The magistrate judge correctly concluded that that the majority of the defenses were not
16 antagonistic. Gehrke and Smith’s defense was that they did not commit the crimes. Smith
17 argued that he did not fit the description of the men seen in the neighborhood on the morning of
18 the murder, and Gehrke presented alibi evidence. Petitioner denied he solicited the assault, and
19 presented the additional defense that someone other than himself had solicited the assault.
20 Gehrke and Smith’s defense that they did not commit the crimes was not antagonistic because it
21 actually bolstered Petitioner’s defense that he did not solicit them to commit the crimes. Because
22 a jury could accept Smith and Gehrke’s defense that they did not commit the crimes, and also
23 accept Petitioner’s defense that he did not solicit them to commit the crimes, failure to sever did
24 not create a serious risk of compromising a particular trial right or prevent the jury from reliably
25 determining guilt or innocence. While Gehrke and Smith also presented evidence and argument
26 suggesting Petitioner was the killer, the magistrate judge and appellate court correctly noted that
27 Petitioner does not explain why this evidence would not have been admissible in a separate trial
28 against him if the prosecution had decided to pursue a similar theory.

1 Accordingly, the Court rejects Petitioner's objections, adopts the Report, and denies the
2 petition as to this part of Petitioner's second claim.

3 **b. Right to testify**

4 Petitioner argues that the state court's failure to sever his trial circumscribed his right to
5 testify on his own behalf. At trial, Petitioner chose not to testify due to the trial judge's
6 determination that, for impeachment purposes, the transcript of Petitioner's confidential "free
7 talk" interview with the prosecutor must be turned over to his co-defendants if he testified.²
8 Petitioner contends that if the "free talk" transcript would not have been turned over, he would
9 have given testimony about Rawson owing money to Phifer, which would tend to show Phifer
10 was the one involved in the conspiracy. (Pet. at 12.)

11 The magistrate judge accurately described the issue involving the "free talk" interview as
12 follows:

13 The agreement reached between Petitioner, his counsel and the deputy District
14 Attorney stated that the government as well as the other defendants could use any
15 inconsistent statements made during the free talk to impeach Petitioner if he
16 testified. (Lodgment No. 1, Reporter's Tr. ["RT"] at 1587-88.) Petitioner's
17 counsel argued extensively at trial that the free talk should not be turned over to
18 the other defendants if Petitioner testified. Counsel argued there was information
in the free talk which had not yet come out at trial which was damaging to
Petitioner, including information about events of which the other defendants were
not aware, and such information would not constitute impeachment because
Petitioner would not testify as to those events. (RT 1589-90.)

19 (Report at 17:1-9.) The appellate court denied Petitioner's claim, stating that "it was not the joint
20 trial, but instead the interview, that created the situation of which Petitioner now complains."
21 (Lodgment No. 6, *People v. Gehrke, et al.*, D042984, slip op. at 42.)

22 The magistrate judge correctly concluded that Petitioner has identified no clearly
23 established federal law protecting him from being cross-examined with prior inconsistent out-of-
24 court statements which were freely given, such as the "free talk" here, or in protecting such
25 statements from discovery.

26
27 ² Both the trial and appellate courts found that the "free talk" contained no material
28 required to be turned over to the defense under *Brady v. Maryland*, 373 U.S. 83 (1963), or any
information which would have assisted the other defendants in defending the charges against
them. (Lodgment No. 6, *People v. Gehrke, et al.*, D042984, slip op. at 19-20.)

1 Petitioner objects on the ground that failure to sever denied Petitioner's attorney the
2 ability to deliver the "constitutionally minimum level of representation under the Sixth
3 Amendment," because the defense's strategy was that Petitioner could testify without fear of the
4 "free talk" being released. (Objections at 12:21-26.) This objection fails. Petitioner does not
5 argue that his attorney "made errors so serious that counsel was not functioning as the 'counsel'
6 guaranteed the defendant by the Sixth Amendment." See Strickland v. Washington, 466 U.S.
7 668, 687 (1984).

8 Petitioner also objects on the ground that the prosecution breached its agreement
9 regarding the "free talk." (Objections at 12:27-13:1-4.) However, a habeas petition will be
10 granted for prosecutorial misconduct only when the misconduct "so infected the trial with
11 unfairness as to make the resulting conviction a denial of due process." Darden v. Wainwright,
12 477 U.S. 168, 181 (1986). Petitioner does not explain how the prosecution breached its
13 agreement. The agreement stated that the prosecution would not use anything in the transcript
14 except as impeachment. (Pet. at 12.) The trial court made the determination, upon the co-
15 defendants' request, that the transcript must be turned over because the co-defendants also had
16 the right to impeach Petitioner. (Pet. at 12.)

17 Accordingly, the Court rejects Petitioner's objections, adopts the Report, and denies the
18 petition as to this part of Petitioner's second claim.

19 **C. Admission of Co-Defendant's Extrajudicial Statements**

20 Petitioner argues that his right to confront and cross-examine witnesses under the Sixth
21 and Fourteenth Amendments was violated by the admission of co-defendant Smith's
22 extrajudicial statements as adoptive admissions by Gehrke. (Pet. at 8.) Phifer testified at trial
23 that after the killing, Smith said "we offed him man" and "I sent it on home with the old timer,"
24 referring to a knife Smith had which he called the "old timer." (Lodgment No. 8 at 28; Lodgment
25 No. 7 at 16-18; Lodgment No. 3 at 18-25.) Prior to trial, Gehrke moved to sever his trial because
26 of Smith's statements. On appeal, Petitioner joined in Gehrke's claim that admission of the
27 statements constituted Bruton/Aranda error. The magistrate judge correctly looked through the
28 silent denial of this claim by the state supreme court to the appellate court opinion.

1 The Sixth Amendment's Confrontation Clause provides that "[i]n all criminal
2 prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right . . . to be confronted with the witnesses against
3 him." Crawford v. Washington, 541 U.S. 36, 42 (2004). The magistrate judge correctly
4 concluded that the appellate court's decision that introduction of Smith's admission did not
5 violate the Confrontation Clause was neither contrary to nor involved an unreasonable
6 application of Bruton v. United States, 391 U.S. 123 (1968). The Supreme Court in Bruton
7 specifically declined to address the issue of whether admission of a co-defendant's statement
8 which satisfied an exception to the hearsay rule, such as the adoptive admission exception here,
9 would violate the Confrontation Clause. Id. at 128 n.3 ("There is not before us, therefore, any
10 recognized exception to the hearsay rule insofar as petitioner is concerned and we intimate no
11 view whatever that such exceptions necessarily raise questions under the Confrontation
12 Clause.").

13 The magistrate judge also correctly concluded that the appellate court's decision was
14 neither contrary to nor involved an unreasonable application of Crawford, 541 U.S. 36. In
15 Crawford, the Supreme Court stated that the introduction of prior testimonial statements of a
16 witness violates a defendant's confrontation rights unless the person who made the statements is
17 unavailable to testify and there was a prior opportunity for cross-examination. Id. at 68. The
18 Court in Crawford, however, did not decide whether the Confrontation Clause has any
19 application to nontestimonial statements, such as Smith's statements to Phifer. Id. ("Where
20 nontestimonial hearsay is at issue, it is wholly consistent with the Framers' design to afford the
21 States flexibility in their development of hearsay law Where testimonial evidence is at issue,
22 however, the Sixth Amendment demands what the common law required: unavailability and a
23 prior opportunity for cross-examination.")

24 Finally, the magistrate judge correctly concluded that, to the extent the Supreme Court
25 case of White v. Illinois survives Crawford, the appellate court's finding was neither contrary to
26 nor involved an unreasonable application of White because Smith's statement fell within the
27 firmly established hearsay exception for adoptive admissions and was made under conditions
28 which render it reliable. See 502 U.S. 346, 355-56 (1992) (holding that out-of-court statements
by a four-year old girl who did not testify and was not unavailable were admissible under the

1 “spontaneous exclamation” and “statements made for medical treatment’ exceptions to the
2 hearsay rule, and did not violate the Confrontation Clause). Faulty recollection is unlikely
3 because Smith made the statements only two days after the killing; there is no apparent reason
4 why Smith would want to wrongfully implicate Gehrke and Petitioner; and furthermore, the
5 statements were against Smith’s own penal interest.

6 In any event, the magistrate judge correctly concluded any error would be harmless. In a
7 § 2254 habeas case the inquiry is whether the error “had substantial and injurious effect or
8 influence in determining the jury’s verdict.” Brecht v. Abrahamson, 507 U.S. 619, 638 (1993);
9 Fry v. Pliler, 551 U.S. 112, 122 (2007) (holding that the Brecht standard applies in § 2254
10 proceedings). This standard applies “whether or not the state appellate court recognized the error
11 and reviewed it for harmlessness under the ‘harmless beyond a reasonable doubt’ standard set
12 forth in Chapman.” Id. The judge asks directly, “Do I, the judge, think that the error
13 substantially influenced the jury’s decision?” O’Neal v. McAninch, 513 U.S. 432, 437 (1995).
14 “[W]hen a habeas court is in grave doubt as to the harmlessness of an error that affects
15 substantial rights, it should grant relief.” Id. at 445. The magistrate judge correctly found that
16 Smith’s statements were cumulative to Stark’s testimony, other evidence that Smith and Gehrke
17 killed the victim, and evidence of Petitioner’s actions before and after the killing, and therefore,
18 the alleged error did not have a “substantial and injurious effect or influence in determining the
19 jury’s verdict.”

20 In his objections, Petitioner argues that Confrontation Clause violations are structural
21 errors that cannot be held harmless. This argument fails because the Supreme Court has held
22 that “denial of the opportunity to cross-examine an adverse witness does not fit within the
23 limited category of constitutional errors that are deemed prejudicial in every case.” Delaware v.
24 Van Arsdall, 475 U.S. 673, 682 (1986).

25 Accordingly, the Court rejects Petitioner’s objections, adopts the Report, and denies the
26 petition as to this claim.

27 **CERTIFICATE OF APPEALABILITY**

28 A petitioner complaining of detention arising from state court proceedings must obtain a
certificate of appealability to file an appeal of the final order in a federal habeas proceeding. 28


1 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(1)(A) (2007). The district court may issue a certificate of appealability if the
2 petitioner “has made a substantial showing of the denial of a constitutional right.” *Id.* §
3 2253(c)(2). To make a “substantial showing,” the petitioner must “demonstrat[e] that
4 ‘reasonable jurists would find the district court’s assessment of the constitutional claims
5 debatable[.]’” *Beatty v. Stewart*, 303 F.3d 975, 984 (9th Cir. 2002) (quoting *Slack v. McDaniel*,
6 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000)). Petitioner has not made a “substantial showing” as to any of the
7 claims raised by his petition, and thus the Court *sua sponte* denies a certificate of appealability.

8 CONCLUSION

9 In sum, Petitioner has not established that the appellate court’s decision was contrary to,
10 or involved an unreasonable application of, clearly established federal law, or was based on an
11 unreasonable determination of the facts in light of the evidence presented in the state courts. The
12 Court hereby: (1) adopts the Report in full; (2) rejects the petitioner’s objections; (3) denies the
13 petition for writ of habeas corpus; and (4) denies a certificate of appealability.

14 **IT IS SO ORDERED.**

15 **DATED: March 17, 2010.**

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17 IRMA E. GONZALEZ, Chief Judge
18 United States District Court
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